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Two countries, one love: Hungarians perform at Poetry Gathering

Free Press Staff Writer



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ELKO — People of the American West and the Hungarian puszta are not all that different, especially when it comes to their love of the land.

Love for the land, quality treatment of animals and a passion for music are similar traditions that made Hungarian talent a perfect fit for the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering on Monday night.

The Western Folklife Center strives to include an international element in each Gathering.

“It’s important because the herding lifestyles have a lot of similarities around the world and it’s fascinating for people to understand that, but they are also endangered by population growth, global warming, pressure for globalization,” said Dave Stanley, host of the Monday night show “Hungarian Soul.”

Stanley is a folklorist and Gathering volunteer who helped find the Hungarian talent and guests.

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“For various reasons, cattle people are stock people and all around the world very often represent values that are very important to a particular country that are being lost or people fear are being lost,” he said.

All over the world, from the American West to Hungary, the cowboy is an icon. Stanley said in Hungarian travel guides a horseman, or csikosok, will often grace the front page, the same way the cowboy is an icon in the United States.

Following a ranch tour on Sunday, Hungarians Imre Nagy, Imre Juhasz, Erika Molnar and musician Janos Csik, as well as the Gyanta Band, took to the stage at the Western Folklife Center to perform songs and poetry from the puszta — the great plains of Hungary — and share pieces of their ranching culture.

Agnes Kemecsei, a translator from Hungary, said it was the first time many of the performers have come to the United States.

“We were lucky to spend the day before on a ranch. We were discussing and seeing how they treat the animals and we found many similarities,” Kemecsei said prior to the show Monday night. “The yearly routine of how to treat the animals and also the way of thinking, of people, how they look at their animals and try to work with them and train the horses.”

“Hungarian Soul” was a compilation performance with an educational program on the Hungarian puszta, followed by songs, dance and poetry.

Kemecsei took to the stage at the beginning of the performance to read a short Hungarian poem.

In English it reads:

“I will be a horseman, I will be a cowherder ... I will be with my little angel in the summer.”

Csik and the Gyanta band play folk music from Hungary and Transylvania with a combination of the violin, viola and bass.

Singer and violinist Csik is one of Hungary’s most well-known artists. On stage with Csik was the Gyanta Band from Canada, who specialize in Hungarian folk music.

Juhasz is a horse breeder, leather craftsman and folk art workshop teacher. Molnar is a teacher who now works part-time for the Hortobagy National Park's Visitor Center as a weaver and teacher. Nagy grew up on his grandfather's farm and worked as a horseman and cowherder. He also learned to do traditional leatherwork, braiding and whip making from a senior herder.

Stanley has been a part of the Gathering since the beginning. In 2007, he was given a Fulbright grant and sent overseas with his wife to the University of Budapest to teach a class on American folklore.

Having always been interested in cowboys and the American West, he began to go out to the puszta, in Eastern Hungary.

"There I discovered there was a traditional herding culture and fascinating breeds of animals, herdsman who wore different kinds of hats and used different kinds of sticks, and they have a class system out there," Stanley said.

In 2009, Stanley returned to the Hungarian puszta with two others from the WFC and they began to find performers and guests to be a part of the Gathering.

For information on the Gathering schedule or ticket sales, visit **www.westernfolklife.org**.

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